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## A THEORY OF THE DIVINE AND HUMAN ELEMENTS IN GENESIS I.-XI.<sup>1</sup>

By WILLIAM R. HARPER,  
The University of Chicago.

*Some propositions.—Objections proposed by those who have ignored the human element.—Objections proposed by those who have ignored the divine element.—Concluding words.*

It is the purpose of this, the last article of the series, to formulate, if possible, a theory which shall cover the facts noted in preceding articles. This task is undertaken with a full appreciation of its difficulty and its delicacy. It is not expected that, under the limitations imposed, it will be possible to do more than make some suggestions toward a theory. It is manifestly impossible to elaborate the many points which should receive attention. The steps cannot all be enumerated; as in the genealogical tables of olden times, only the most important may be indicated. The question before us is, Whence came these early stories of Genesis? Of what value are they? How came they to occupy their present place at the very threshold of Sacred Scripture? We shall take up first a series of propositions, and later objections urged from various sides.

### *I. Some propositions.*

1. Man lived once in a state of original innocence; he sinned and as a consequence fell. This is the teaching of Genesis and the teaching throughout of Scripture. No man can accept the Scriptures without accepting this most fundamental doctrine. It does not follow, however, that what seems to be the teaching of science is wholly inconsistent. It is possible, certainly, to accept a doctrine of evolution and at the same time to accept the truth of these representations. Our starting point, however, whether in accordance with the teaching of science or not, is a

<sup>1</sup> A portion of this paper was read at the meeting of the Baptist Congress, held in Detroit, Mich., Nov. 15-17, 1894.

sinful world, which must be lifted back again to God from whom it once came forth perfect.

2. An examination of sacred and profane history shows that from the dawn of history there has been a gradual upward movement. This is nothing other than the development of the plan of God for the "salvation" of men. Sacred Scripture teaches, and the facts of history indicate, that in this upward movement the fundamental principle has been *that work for man shall be done by man*. So rigid was the application of this principle that the Son of God himself became a man in order that the work might be accomplished without violating it. The divine thought has worked in the hearts of individuals and in the heart of nations, and with every advancing century there has been steady increase of power and manifest growth in resources. Nearer and nearer, with each great cycle, humanity has approached the goal. No scholar, who is a Christian, can be a pessimist.

3. At the very beginning the true pedagogical principle was adopted, namely, that of teaching *one* in order that this one might teach many others. Noah was selected as the only righteous man in all the earth, and with him, the race having become corrupt, a new start is made.

4. In accordance with the fundamental principle of the plan adopted, a principle which, as has been said, is strictly pedagogical, of the three sons of Noah, Shem was selected, in whose family there should be a special manifestation of the divine presence; and in later times, Abraham of the many descendants of Shem is chosen. The progress of the divine plan seems to have been slow, but no one fails to observe its thorough-going character.

5. With the transplanting of Abraham, a most important step forward is taken, likewise a most radical step; for this is the beginning of a national history. The chosen nation is as yet only a family. It is better, therefore, to call the period beginning with Abraham, family history rather than national history. In this family history, as well as in the national history which develops out of it, God acts in a special manner, that is,

he enters into it as in no other history.<sup>1</sup> Through the divine influence Abraham abandons idolatry, and there is another beginning of the connection with the true God. Abraham likewise carries with him the traditions of the past which were current among his countrymen. These traditions, as well as his religious ideas, are purified and begin to descend through father to son in their new and more representative form.

6. The work goes on very slowly. The divine influence is felt; but as it would seem, God acts in revelation as well as in nature, slowly. Gradually the heart of man is lifted up and becomes capable of receiving the message in higher and more perfect form. Then come the residence in Egypt, the great work of Moses, the giving of a legislative code, the period of the judges, the reorganization by Samuel, the development of the monarchy, the lyric contributions of David (perhaps ten or fifteen), the division between north and south, and, within a century, the remarkable prophetic activity exhibited in the schools of the prophets, in the work of Elijah, Elisha, and Jonah. The period from the departure out of Egypt to the division of the kingdom, is one of alternate rise and fall. At one time the nation seems to be making headway, at another it loses all the advantage it has gained; now forward, now backward; but after all, the period, taken as a whole, shows immense advance.

7. The time has now come for more rapid progress; more rapid, because foundations have been laid on which something may be built. In order, therefore, that the work may be accelerated, and in order that there may be high and strong incentive for further progress, certain men, themselves the outgrowth of this divinely guided history, and the product of the natural and supernatural influences which have been long centuries at work, are incited and guided to read correctly the story of this plan as it has developed in the past, and to record their reading of it in a form which shall be most helpful. There seems to have been but slight movement in the direction of literary work in Israel before this time. Literary documents

<sup>1</sup> THE BIBLICAL WORLD, November, p. 352.

exist which have come down from earlier centuries, but they are only fragments. The nation had not yet reached the point when literary production was essential, or indeed possible. The memories of the past were, however, many and fresh. As among all primitive peoples, father transmitted to son the family and tribal stories. It is not to be understood that writing was not known, for as recent discoveries, for example, the Tel el-Amarna tablets, have most clearly shown, there were among the surrounding nations literatures already somewhat developed.

8. The great prehistoric events, among others the fall, the deluge, and the stories of beginnings of civilization, made so great an impression upon the primitive man as to have led to their transmission in various ways through many nations. The facts thus transmitted take on various forms in the different nations. Some of these facts are preserved more fully and more clearly in one nation than in another.

9. The Hebrews, among others, inherited these traditions. When Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, many of them must have been familiar to him. Naturally, coming himself to be a monotheist, such traditions, passing through his hands, must have assumed more or less of the purified and monotheistic form which they present in later days. It is not probable, however, that this purified and monotheistic form originated at one time. It may better be supposed that it was gradual in its development. Many of the oldest traditions are rejected by the descendants of Abraham because of their polytheistic and degraded character. Those adopted are in each case modified in order to accommodate them to the religious spirit which has now developed in the hearts and minds of the chosen people.

10. In later times, namely, the times following those of Elisha, Elijah, and Jonah, when there has come to exist wonderful activity of a prophetic character, certain prophetic writers, guided by the divine spirit, undertake to teach the people of their times and of future times, the law of God on certain essential matters, and in doing this to employ the material handed down from the past. The material within their reach was doubtless of great variety and very copious. The prophetic

writers, however, in each case, have before them a definite conception of the teachings which they would promulgate, and are controlled throughout by this definite purpose. Each writer, therefore, (*a*) *selects* from the great mass of material that which will answer his purpose, rejecting twenty stories, or a hundred, where he takes a single one, the basis of selection being, as above stated, the adaptability of the stories selected to the great purpose which fills his heart and mind; (*b*) *purifies* the material thus selected by rejecting everything that would tend to foster wrong ideas of what was believed to be essential truth, by omitting also that which was false and calculated to mislead in any way; (*c*) *interprets* the material thus selected as only a prophet of God acquainted with the divine laws could interpret it, seeing with the insight given from above the real significance of these events of old, incorporating this significance and connecting this interpretation with the facts narrated in such a way as to make the result not history, but a great religious story; (*d*) *embellishes*, in a manner beyond criticism from the artistic point of view, the material thus purified and incorporated, so as to make these stories, what history has shown them to be, the most beautiful and effective pedagogical material ever prepared; (*e*) *arranges* them in an order, with a connection and consecution which indicate unity of purpose and execution, this arrangement being frequently logical rather than chronological.

11. Side by side with the development of the prophetic idea there has come also the priestly. The latter, indeed, preceded the former in its origin and in its first active manifestations. Including (*a*) elements inherited from other nations, (*b*) elements borrowed from Egypt, (*c*) the new organization and the additional elements rising in the time of Moses, the system continued to develop from century to century, sometimes falling back, at other times taking advanced ground. In course of time the idea is conceived of narrating the origin and growth of this great system, which has now come to be pervasive in its influence, and all but supreme in its control. A man of priestly habits, guided by the Holy Spirit, undertakes to make a collection of these ancient traditions which shall indicate the divine lessons

which from his point of view they were intended to teach, and follows the plan adopted by his brethren the prophets. Whether he preceded them or followed them is not a question to be discussed at this point. The plan was the same, the general purpose the same; and so he selects, and purifies, and interprets, and embellishes, and arranges the material to accomplish the end he has in view.

12. The purpose of the prophetic writers was to teach the law of God concerning the life of men; how men should live, how they should not live; the difference between right and wrong, and the trouble and invariable consequences of doing wrong. The purpose of the priest was to show the development step by step of the plan of God for the salvation of men; how one institution after another was established, and how, in connection with each, a covenant was entered into with man: (1) The institution of the Sabbath, preceded by what was practically a covenant to give to man the dominion of the earth; (2) the institution of the sacredness of blood, and in connection with this the covenant with Noah; (3) the institution of circumcision, and in connection with this the covenant with Abraham—all these leading up to the last, the greatest, (4) the giving of the law on Sinai, and the covenant entered into with Israel.

13. At a later period, how much later is and always will be a matter of uncertainty, an editor filled with the same general purpose and guided by the same spirit, undertakes to join these various representations together. He makes such changes as seem to him best to be made. He omits material now from one narrative, now from another. He places side by side the different interpretations of the same event, for he sees that, however much these differ one from another, the essential ideas are the same. The world would have been a great loser if this editor had given us only one account of each of the events described. Reference has been restricted in the foregoing statement to the material which makes up the stories of Genesis I.–XI.

We see that the work was done *through man for man*. Prophets and priests acquainted with the principles of divine government undertake to illustrate these principles and in connection

with the illustrations to formulate them. The truth imparted to them from on high is thus given objective form. But every effort to illustrate or to formulate was restricted by limitations of a serious character; limitations growing out of their own imperfect abilities and due also to the character of the people in whose interests they were working. It is true that to Israelitish history God sustained a peculiar relation. As has been said, he entered into this history in a unique way. It was in a true sense divine history; the best history Almighty Power, acting in consistency with other attributes, and working in the hearts of the people dragged down with sin, could inspire.

The same may be said of Israelitish literature; God sustained to it a peculiar relation. It was the best literature Almighty Power, acting in consistency with other attributes, could inspire in the hearts of a people of Semitic blood, living in that period of the world's history; and yet it is imperfect, including different and differing accounts of the same event; what from the point of view of history and science are errors and inconsistencies; what is certainly a total disregard of the common laws of history-writing in vogue today. What, now, shall we say concerning these chapters and the others? That they contain the word of God? This is not sufficient. In the truest and fullest sense, they *are* the word of God. They are and constitute the word of God. Israelitish history being divine history in a unique and peculiar sense, the literature growing out of that history is divine literature in just the same sense. God worked in other history, and the revelation of God appears in other literature, but we must go back to Israelitish history and to Israelitish literature to find the real God-history and the real God-word. The history and the word, each considered as a manifestation of the divine purpose and action, and as a revelation of principles covering faith and duty, are perfect and infallible.

II. *Objections presented by those who have ignored the human element.*

1. Are not the outside stories, copied from the Bible stories? This position is untenable because (1) there is satisfactory evi-



dence that some of the outside stories were in their present form before Israel was a nation; (2) the biblical stories contain upon their face the evidence of comparatively late origin; (3) this objection is based upon the supposition that there was a primitive revelation of the material contained in these stories, which has been preserved pure and intact alone in the Hebrew account. This supposition is opposed at the same time to all the historical facts involved, and to any proper conception of the development of the Old Testament religion.

2. Did not Moses, according to the New Testament, write the law and is not any denial of this fact a denial of the veracity of Jesus himself? It is true that Moses organized the institutions of Israel as they had been inherited or borrowed from other nations before his time, and this pre-Mosaic element in the Mosaic system is very considerable. It is also true that in this reorganization new principles were given by Moses which justify tradition and history in ascribing his name to the system; but it is equally true that many additions and modifications were made in the centuries that followed. Should criticism prove that the larger portion of the Mosaic system, as we have it today, arose in a post-Mosaic period, it would not in any way contradict the representations made in the New Testament. A considerable portion of the law, upon any hypothesis, was Mosaic; the remainder grew out of the Mosaic portion and was permeated by the Mosaic spirit. The real essence of the law was Mosaic, and therefore we are justified today in calling it the Mosaic system. The greatest of our Hebrew grammars is still called by the name of Gesenius although the author has been dead for years, and many new editions of the grammar published since his death, each edition containing modifications of the old material and the addition of much new material. The last edition of Webster's dictionary probably contains very little of what was in the book when the author died. The efforts of certain teachers to make Jesus Christ responsible for a theory which modern scholarship has shown to be false, are attended with great risk. An exact parallel is to be found in the attitude of men, actuated by the same spirit, who said fifty years ago that if the day of creation

was not a day of twenty-four hours, the Bible was false. Thinking men should not allow their eyes to be blinded in this artful and superficial way.

3. Was there no revelation from God before 900 B.C.? This is not a fair implication, for it is distinctly maintained that the facts underlying these narratives are facts which were known to all the intervening centuries; and so far as these facts carry with them the lessons found there, revelation must be acknowledged. It is distinctly maintained that Abraham handed down these stories in a purified form, and that the essence of the Mosaic teaching, which was revealed from God, was known to the people of and after Moses' time. The acceptance of the analysis does not, therefore, bring down the date of the first revelation to the year 900 B.C. It only concedes that the present literary form of this revelation dates from about that period. A distinction must be made between the events themselves and the literary form. An example of this may be seen in the case of the prophet Jonah. The historical narrative in Kings tells us that he was a prophet of the time of Jereboam II., and did his work under that monarch. The evidence presented by the Book of Jonah is that this book comes from a period later than 400 to 450 B.C. In order to understand the *work* of Jonah, and at the same time to understand the *book* of Jonah, one therefore must distinguish between the time of the prophet and the time at which the prophetic narrative assumed its present shape. The fact that the book is of late date does not indicate that the prophet Jonah lived during this later period rather than in the period to which history assigns him.

4. *How can this material be the word of God and yet contain errors and inaccuracies?* It seems impossible to take the space required for a detailed answer to this question. It will be sufficient, at this time, to note, (1) the parallelism between Israelitish history into which God entered in a special way, and Israelitish literature given above (pages 410-13); (2) the fact universally accepted that in the present manuscripts and versions of our Bible, there are errors and inaccuracies; (3) the impossibility of supposing *a priori* that anything with which a human hand has

had to do could be absolutely perfect ; (4) that there is no necessity for demanding absolute freedom from error except as concerns religious truth.

5. *How can a statement be false in fact and yet ideally true ?* In this form the question is often asked. A moment's consideration shows that this putting of the question is a begging of it. In reply to it we may say (1) that according to the hypothesis here presented the statements are not false in fact. It has been maintained that these statements were true in their essence ; (2) that in any case care must be taken to distinguish fact and truth ; there are many facts which teach no truth ; there is much truth which is not dependent upon fact. (3) That even fiction has been employed in all periods of the world's history for the inculcation of the most important truth. Our Lord himself employed the parable which is a species of fiction. (4) That the phrase "idealized history" presupposes in the case of every narrative to which it is applied, real and genuine history. (5) That this phrase, properly interpreted, means history written for a special purpose, implying, of course, something different from and higher than history written merely to narrate or chronicle facts.

6. *Did not the Bible produce history, rather than history the Bible ?* The Bible has produced no history, although history has been moulded and colored by the teachings and representations of the Bible. The history of christianity from the first century down has been influenced by the Bible, but the history of Christianity was not produced by the Bible. Certain great events took place. There would have been historical consequences from these events even if they had never been recorded in literary form. The truth is on every hand that the Bible is the outgrowth of history. David, Isaiah, and Ezekiel lived and worked. Their life and work were a part of the history of the nation Israel. Out of this there grew the Bible. The fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not any record of it, is the foundation of the believer's belief in his own resurrection. The record of the transaction does not prove it to have taken place. Its occurrence without any written record may be satisfactorily proven. The chief difficulty in popular thought in reference to

the Bible lies in the fact that it has put the cart before the horse in placing emphasis upon the record rather than upon the history which produced the record.

*III. Objections urged by those who have ignored the divine element.*

1. How can it be shown that these words are not the work of a comparatively late date? This follows from (1) their external character (including literary style and historical allusions) as compared with that of other similar stories; (2) their fundamental character in relation to the older biblical system, the beginnings of which, we must concede, date back to great antiquity; (3) their perfect consistency with the representations which they make concerning themselves.

2. *How can it be shown that God acted in Hebrew history as in no other?* This is the teaching of the facts in the case, for if we study Hebrew history in its environment, Hebrew religious teaching in the midst of the teachings of surrounding nations, the peculiar outcome of Israelitish history as seen in New Testament history, the institutions of Israel as compared with those of other nations, the position of Israel today among the nations of the earth,—there is surely no ground, from a scientific point of view, for doubting this fundamental position.

3. *Is there any more of inspiration in these records than in the work, for example, of John Bunyan?* Because these records are the outgrowth of a theocratic life, a life into which God entered as into no other, the inspiration which belongs to them is peculiar and may not be compared with that of even the world's greatest thinkers. This is something unique and incomparable. The history being what it was, the records are what they are. If, in the providence of God, there shall come another epoch in the world's history, during which he shall select and treat some nation as he did Israel of old, then and not till then shall we have writings to which may be accorded the same kind of inspiration that we accord to the records of Sacred Scripture.

4. *Is the predictive element sufficiently specific to prove anything?* Yes. Even upon the supposition that these predictions come from a period not earlier than the eighth or ninth centuries B. C., we find in them evidence of a knowledge of the

future development of the history of the human race which cannot be explained except upon the ground of the revelation from God. Prediction, to be sure, is and must be general, and these predictions may be said to be generic in each case. It remains true, however, that although generic, the details are of such a character as to make it impossible that they should have been uttered without some peculiar knowledge of the divine plan, or at all events of the principles which underlie that plan.

5. *Cannot the superiority of the Hebrew stories be accounted for on purely natural grounds?* The effort to do this has been made many times, but always without success. It is just as great a mistake to throw out the supernatural element and try to explain everything from a purely natural view as it is to throw out the natural element and try to explain everything from the supernatural view. There is, without question, natural development, but in connection with this and permeating it through and through, there was a divine element. If we allow this divine element to be recognized as one of the factors, then everything may be said to be natural. It is impossible, however, to explain the presence of certain elements in Hebrew history and narrative, or the absence of the same elements in the history and narrative of contemporaneous nations, without asking why, if in the former case it was natural, it does not appear also in the latter?

6. *If these stories are divine why do men, Christians as well as skeptics, so largely fail to recognize the divine element?* No one will deny that few people comparatively believe in the historical or even the religious value of these stories. This does not disprove the divine element in them. It shows merely that these people deny a particular current interpretation of these stories, and that the world supposed that in the denial of this particular interpretation there is also a denial of the divine element in them. All this is wrong. A reasonable view of the narratives will receive acceptance. It is because men have been expected to adopt a thoroughly artificial and monstrous interpretation that they have been compelled to deny the divine element. When the real facts of the material are presented, and the true philos-

ophy of the divine element is understood, men will no longer hesitate to accept these chapters as an organic part of the divine word with which they are connected, and they will no longer make their unbelief in these chapters an excuse for their unbelief in the Bible as a whole.

The writer is conscious of the fact that his statements made in these lectures when they were originally delivered and repeated now in this more tangible form have been the subject of much discussion. These statements have been misunderstood and misinterpreted by some. There is much evidence, however, that the statements have been appreciated by many, and that they have been a source of help to not a few. To each of the three classes into which all readers were at first divided, it remains to say just a word.

Do not you who have always literalized the Scriptures now realize how impossible, how really dangerous it is to cling to a theory with so small a basis, a theory the only support of which is tradition and *a priori* argument? Do you not see that as surely as there is a God you are pulling him down into the dust, that you are degrading him whom you would honor? Will you longer dictate to him how to act and what to do and not rather, studying reverently and closely the events and deeds recorded, from these determine what he is and what is his method of dealing with men? I may be pardoned for repeating what has been said before. It was the literal and artificial handling of Scripture which blinded the eyes of the Jews and led to the rejection of the Messiah when he came. This same literal and artificial method has blinded the eyes of men today, and as a result the Old Testament is practically rejected from being reckoned a part of the Divine Word. Why will you continue to place the letter *below* the spirit?

Of you who have never seen the hand of God in these holy pages, I ask for honest and candid thought. I do not blame you for failing to accept the literal and artificial theory of which I have spoken. But show me why you should not accept this broader, yet simpler way of looking at these things. I have presented you a reasonable view. It is based upon scientific

evidence. It has come from an examination of the facts. It covers the facts as does no other hypothesis. If you will make this point of view your own, and henceforth read these chapters, remembering that there is something in them more than the human, your life will be quickened, you will come nearer to God, you will see what the divine writers have desired you to see, the magnitude of sin and the still greater magnitude of the love of God.

There were those whose attitude was that of indifference, but I cannot make myself believe that there is a man or woman who has carefully looked into the contents of these chapters, and after such investigation remained indifferent. Whatever view such an one may have had, whatever view he now holds, he has thrown aside, I am persuaded, his former apathy. These chapters have for him now a great significance, and with difficulties at least in part removed, with the way at least in part clearer, he will not know hereafter what it is to be indifferent to the highest, holiest, deepest things ever penned. It were better to be a skeptic than to be indifferent.

If I have helped any one by the publication of these papers, and the testimonials so frequently and kindly given convince me that I have, I thank God that he has furnished me the opportunity to do this service. If, on the other hand, my words have disturbed any ; if anything has been said which would weaken the faith in God or in the Christ, or in the Word, I sincerely trust that a higher power will counteract the injurious influence which my words may have exerted, and that to such persons there may be given special strength to resist the machinations of the evil one, who is at their side making every effort to persuade them that *truth* is harmful and that a search for truth may lead to wrong. It is not so. Truth is divine, and to try to find it is the most glorious work that man can do ; because searching for truth is searching for God.